

All About Me: The Kanye West Election Campaign Rally

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In many ways, rapper and footwear mogul Kanye West fits the mould. That mould – the star or celebrity running for high office – had already been made by the actor-cum-amnesiac Ronald Reagan, who, with his dabbling in astrology and conveniently re-imagined reminiscences, did much to prepare the White House for what one might call the “reality show”. The fruit from that garden has been ample and bitter.

After announcing his improbable and almost certainly doomed campaign for the US presidency, West, after flirting with dropping out, decided to at least have a campaign rally. Like other countries who have witnessed celebrities gather the electoral silver and make their way into office, West is playing politics emptied of politics, the patient extracted of the nerve. The anti-political politician is an oxymoron, but it is an oxymoron that has speared and skewered statecraft. The political classes are petrified in alienation, representatives shielded behind armies of pollsters, public relations gurus and party machinery. The voter might as well vote for a candidate on the autopilot gravy train. The lunatic you get is the lunatic you see.

West is his own gravy train, admittedly also stocked up with provisions from his fellow celebrity companion, Kim Kardashian. His articulations are pricks of irritation, rarely credible and almost always reversible. He does his utmost to convince that he is some discount idiot savant, trying to sound profound even as he fumbles. His [rally](#) at Charleston, South Carolina left something for everybody, though no one present should have been confused by the “all about me” theme.

It all started with predictable theatre. There was no microphone. West donned a bulletproof vest. (You ought to be worth shooting to be credible.) “2020” was shaved into performer’s head. The audience gathered could not exactly be called vast, though the rapper promised that future events would be glorious, held in “rooms where the acoustics will be incredible because I will be involved with the design.”

The presentation was peppered by such howlers as that on the abolitionist Harriet Tubman, who “never actually freed the slaves”. What Tubman did, reflected West, was just having “the slaves go work for other white people”. The fogged up looking glass was brought out, with [suggestions](#) by Dani Di Placido in *Forbes* that this might have been some obscure reference to “wage slavery and white supremacy”. That said, a lament follows. Why did West have to go after a “beloved civil rights hero” given his previous Trump love phase, his own “hyper-capitalist ambitions” and the fact of becoming a billionaire which can hardly happen “through opposing wage slavery”?

Knocking off the gloss of the Tubman legacy was part of a show that moved into the realm

of the teary and transcendental, with the performer promoting his inspirational link to the divine. West the mystic spoke of God's intervention, suggesting that fabulous sky creature divines are terribly incurious, and bored, by nature. "I was having the rapper's lifestyle. I was sitting up in Paris, and I had my leather pants on ... and I had my laptop up and I got all of my creative ideas. I got my shoes, I got my sound cover, I got communities, I got clothes, I got all this and the screen [went] black and white and God said, 'if you fuck with my vision I'm going to fuck with yours'."

It all had to do with his child, who served as a good publicity prop for the occasion. This good Lord of the mind blowing "fuck vision" had convinced West that he and his wife should have their baby. "And I called my wife and she said, we're going to have this baby. I said we're gonna have this child ... So even if my wife were to divorce me after this speech, she brought North into the world when I didn't want to. She stood up and she protected that child." To ease any moral or ethical quandaries, West had a solution for troubled couples: give them money. "Everybody that has a baby gets a million dollars."

There was much talk about his entrepreneurial prowess (boosting the Adidas bank balance and share portfolio), his "132 IQ genius", a person who "literally went to the hospital because his brain was too big for his skull".

There were audience interventions that rarely taxed the big-brained wonder. A certain Summer complained about education being "whitewashed", police brutality and the "brainwashing" offered by such technology platforms as TikTok, though West spent more time fussing over not being able to hear anything above the din and distraction: "no camera flicks, no flashes, no moving, no opening up Dorito bags." He also got preoccupied about the exits. "You see where the two exits are? Is it okay to close the doors, but keep them unlocked while we are talking?"

Campaigns for the US presidency can start as engorged, dramatic stunts, with the ego maniac festooned with ambitions that are light on policy but heavy on boastful character. The person promoting it ends up riding a historical train he cannot get off. Donald Trump, to some extent, did just that. Many in the Trump camp, leaving aside such ideological blunder busts as Steve Bannon, were as disbelieving as many others that victory was in the offing that November in 2016. Then the gag got real. West has some way to go before coming close.

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